

Recent range expansion of Chiffchaff into the Taita Hills, southeast Kenya

The avifauna of Kenya is often considered to be one of the best known in the Afrotropics, so new range information from well-studied areas suggests genuine change rather than just improved knowledge. We report here recent observations of Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita* in the Taita Hills (southeast Kenya, 03°20'S, 38°15'E), indicating an expansion of its known winter range. After the observation of some Chiffchaffs in Ngangao and Yale forest, Taita Hills (for a map see Brooks *et al.* 1998) in early February 2004, special attention was paid to all singing and calling *Phylloscopus sp.* in and around the forests during subsequent visits (10 January–10 March 2005 and 18 January–3 February 2006). In 2005, at least 18 Chiffchaffs were observed around Ngangao and Yale forest. In 2006, 35 individuals were recorded from Yale, Ngangao, Chawia, Fururu and Macha. Most individuals were heard between 15 January and 15 February in *Cupressus* and *Pinus* plantations, and single birds were observed in *Cupressus* trees on farmland, in *Eucalyptus* plantation and in the indigenous forest.

In addition to these field observations, one Chiffchaff was mist-netted on 17 January 2005 in vegetation dominated by *Acacia mearnsii*, and fitted with a ring from the East African ringing scheme (ring no. T43982, Figure 1). The coloration and measurements suggested *P. c. abietinus* (Svensson 1992, Clement & Helbig 1998). Measurements were: tarsus = 22.0 mm (with bent foot including “knee” joint), = 20.0 mm (with bent foot excluding “knee” joint); head = 27.4 mm; wing = 66.0 mm (“maximum length” Svensson 1992).

Chiffchaffs are known to winter in west and south Europe, parts of Africa, the Middle East and eastwards to India (Baker 1997). In western Africa, they mostly winter north of 11°N, whereas in eastern Africa, they occur further south, regularly reaching the Kenyan highlands (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989, Pearson 1997). There are few records from southern Kenya and northern Tanzania: Chyulu Hills (Lewis & Pomeroy 1989), Ngulia (Backhurst & Pearson 1990, D. Pearson pers. comm.), “Tsavo” (Ticehurst in Backhurst *et al.* 1973) and several records on Mt. Kilimanjaro (White in Backhurst *et al.* 1973, Moreau & Sclater 1935 in Backhurst *et al.* 1973, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). The only published record from the Taita Hills was by Jackson (1999). Our observations indicate Chiffchaffs are regular winter visitors to the forest of the Taita Hills.

Some authors suggested the occurrence of Chiffchaff in Kenya was inadequately known because it is easily overlooked when not singing (eg. Backhurst *et al.* 1973, Lewis & Pomeroy 1989). However, this seems very unlikely in the Taita Hills since biological researchers (e.g. Brooks *et al.* 1998) and birdwatchers have visited the area regularly. Thus, although the species has been observed in and near to the Taita Hills before, the presence of good



Figure 1. Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* caught in Taita Hills, 17 January 2005 (T. Spanhove).

numbers of Chiffchaffs seems to be a recent phenomenon. Several factors could have played a role in this range-extension. Firstly, most of the Chiffchaffs were observed in *Pinus* and *Cupressus* plantations. The first exotic plantations date from 1925, and the vast majority were created after 1940 (Mbutia 2003 and references therein). Some of the resulting plantations (eg. Ronge at 318 ha and Choke at 73.5 ha) are larger than the remaining indigenous forest fragments. These plantations could be a major attraction for Chiffchaffs. Secondly, in several European countries, the number of Chiffchaffs has significantly increased during the last 20 years (Aunins & Priednieks 2003, Vorisek 2003, Baillie *et al.* 2005). Meanwhile, they are still colonising parts of southern Scandinavia, one of the few areas of Europe not yet inhabited by Chiffchaffs (Hansson *et al.* 2000). It is likely that the increased breeding population has also resulted in an expansion of the normal winter range, especially where suitable habitat has become available.

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Where does Weyns's Weaver *Ploceus weynsi* breed?

Weyns's Weaver *Ploceus weynsi* is confined to central Africa, occurring mainly around the shores of Lake Victoria and along the Congo River in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. It is primarily reported to inhabit forests (Fry & Keith 2004), but is also regularly recorded from lake-shore vegetation